

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

I On Indian Music

II Concerning Uday Shankar

Rene Daumal

Translated from the French by Louise Landes-Levi

The Journal was fortunate in receiving the following two articles, written in 1931 and 1932 in response to Uday Shankar's first performances in Paris. Now, almost half a century later, it is interesting to note the change in the cultural climate, resulting in wide international recognition, serious attention to, and the influence of, Indian/Asian arts. Much of this is owed to Shankar's pioneering efforts, followed decades later by the work of his brother, Ravi Shankar.

Notes from the translator provide some background.

The two essays by Rene Daumal, are translated from the original French and are included in the forthcoming volume of Daumal's Indological studies entitled "The Knowledge of the Self". "Concerning Uday Shankar" was written as a response to an article written by B. de Schloezer condemning the opinion expressed by Daumal in his first article, "On Indian Music". Both articles are interesting, and in some ways complementary, the first presenting a philosophical investigation into the nature of the music, the second delineating more precisely Daumal's sensitivity to the moment of aesthetic perception.

Rene Daumal (1908-1944) was a student of Rene Guenon, who taught him Sanskrit and introduced him to the demands of Indological study. Daumal quickly mastered the language and at the age of 18 prepared a grammar which is highly respected by Sanskrit experts in France. He developed a unique literary career, translating from English and Sanskrit Bharata's

Natya Sastra, extracts from the *Sahitya-Darpana*, the *Bhagavad-Gita*, the *Chandyoga Upanishad*, etc., writing several novels (one of which has been translated into English, entitled "Mount Analogue"), a volume of poetry and extensive literary criticism, and editing the experimental metaphysical journal *Le Grand Jeu*.

The important thing to relate about Daumal is that he did not belong to a school of classical Indology. He had studied Western philosophy but his Indological study was nearly completely auto-didactic. Following his brief formal study of Sanskrit, he completed the entire grammar of the language, published in facsimile in France and prepared a series of remarkable translations and essays from the works mentioned above. All this, not to add to the dust of the academies, but to prepare himself and his reader for a deeper penetration into the nature of language and the nature of man himself, (a nature obscured and distorted in the Occident of his time). What is remarkable in his work, is the individuality of his research and his insistence that the mental refinement necessitated by such a study be accompanied by an interior work of an equal proportion.

His involvement in India permeated every feature of his activity and expression. He studied with Gergieff, the Russian Master, for more than 10 years, in a profound effort to realize and understand the absolute nature of the interior reality. He also became Uday Shankar's secretary in 1932 and 1933, travelling with him to America and supporting his effort to present his aesthetic of the ancient Indian culture to the West.

These essays were written in conjunction with Uday Shankar's performances in Europe. To my knowledge, they are the first examples of Western reaction to live Indian performance. The essay on music was attacked by Musicologists, at the time, but now it is highly regarded by composers and musicians in France.

He died much too young to give us the fruit of his effort; he leaves a beginning and not a completion of a highly refined process.

I

"Musician of Silence" — Mellarme

I did not wish to hear the vocal din with which the French public relieved itself, oppressed by too much unrecognized beauty after the gala premier of Hindu dance and music, given, but like one gives sweets to pigs,

March 3rd. 1931, by Uday Shankar and Timar Baran Bhattacharya. And yet, I was unable to plug-up my ears with enough alacrity to avoid hearing these few words with which the arthritic Bourgeoisie publicly tickled its throat, an assuredly learned view: "The music of those people babbles, it is like their philosophy, always the same measure or same proportion, for hours or for centuries, it's the same monotone." I agreed, madame, it's always the same object that compels this resonant music and philosophy: open your eyes before that which you actually are — you have seen only a desert of boredom. Whose fault is this?

The great Enemy of man, with whom he is engaged in a struggle to death, is Time. Consciousness of pure time, void of content, is intolerable. Try, momentarily, to concentrate on passing time and nothing else. If you succeed, you are beyond this discussion. Occidental man seeks, through all methods, to *kill time*, filling it with sensations, emotions, justifications, diverse agitations or much more commonly, through automations that replace the latter and permit him to sleep 24 hours of the day, beneath the respectable appearance of a more or less well-regulated human being. He invents calendars and watches in order to transform merciless duration, compelling his life to conform to a mathematical time exterior to himself, estranged from his own intimate reality. And yet, these veils, eclipsing the reality of time, reveal themselves to be illusory and vain. Duration resuscitates in the cruel form of *boredom*. The Oriental, in general, chooses another form of battle — I speak of the Oriental who thinks.² He does not try to *kill time* with a thousand methods of sleep, that is to say by killing himself. On the contrary, by living time, he identifies it with himself and annihilates it in his own consciousness. In this way, contrary to common prejudice, it is he who understands how to live and assimilate the immediate reality — and not the Occidental who strains his ingenuity in order to escape by innumerable detours.

And then, all music silences itself in duration, measures duration. Like duration, music is irreversible succession. Thus, whatever else it *may* be, music *is* concretized time, it is audible time. This precious instrument permits us to grasp imperceptible time. It is thus to foresee that both Oriental and Occidental man will profit from the phenomena of this art in order to contend with the old enemy. The contrariety between their methods of combat can be seen in an analysis of the musical traditions which developed in the two civilizations.

In fact, Oriental music bores all purely Occidental individuals. Instead of masking man's formidable devouress beneath a beautiful expression of sound, instead of *distracting* him, it incessantly revives the pressing obsession, it returns, insisting to vivify the dolorous consciousness of duration. Musically, the Occidental seeks a sonorous succession that will clothe and conceal duration. The Indian musician, if not the Oriental musician in general, seeks from sound only the manifestation of silence. Thus, Lao-Tzu³ has said, ten

rays unite to form a wheel, but it is the void in the center that permits the wheel to be used; similarly, a vase is valued, not by the breadth of its sides but by the void which they determine. The Oriental musician aspires, above all, to sculpt in the duration a sequence of *silent moments*, and the auditor realizes each of these moments as the substance of his life, of his consciousness, sorrowed to be limited, bound by an individual skin.

The word "to listen" conveys two very different meanings when referring to one or to the other of these sonorous expressions. Listening to music, the Occidental savours a double pleasure, melodic and harmonic. At first, I will speak of the former only. In the most favourable situation, when the melody is not simply a satisfaction of his instincts, his passions, stirred and pleasantly calmed by the power of sonorous sequences, that which he admires is, above all, the skillful resolution of a problem posed by the musician. The first measure brutally breaks the silence. *Fiat Sonam*: and the sound is separated from silence; the equilibrium is broken and in this initial measure the melodic world with its specific laws is already in seed. To complete his creative glory, the musician must develop this seed, in order to re-establish, after various events and vicissitudes, the equilibrium of primitive silence. But from the beginning, a law is imposed on the musical development; the first rupture of silence provokes a second, then a third, and so on. This display of creative power can in the case of a genius, create bristling granules of the sublime all over the skin. Most often, I prefer to look coldly at the auditor, anxiously suspended in the melodic theme, asking himself, at each instant, how will the musician liberate himself from this difficulty into which he has put himself and he sighs with an admiring satisfaction when finally the sequence of sonorous equations resolves itself in a final silence. Time has been conquered. The reality which is hidden behind the melody, to which our admiration is addressed, is that of an individual will powerful enough to impose itself on the passage of time.⁴

The Asian man has no relation to this art. Particularly for the Hindu, the melodic problems have been resolved for centuries. The individualism of the Western artist, who wishes to surpass himself, to realize through his creation, the image of a god, personal to the work, has no reality for him. An ancient tradition limits the number of musical themes — one would better say musical *colourations* to translate the untranslatable word *raga*. The technique of the *raga* is meticulously governed by very complicated and precise rules. Each *raga* is related to an hour of the day, a season of the year, a state of being; it is male or female, it is this or that colour. The *ragas* are also connected to precise mythological subjects; in the plastic arts they are often represented as living beings. (This will not astonish the Hindu mentality for which the hymns, stanzas and formulas of the *Veda* have been *seen* by the ancient Rishis). All this can disconcert the musician or simply the Occidental auditor. But he must hear the Hindu musician if he wants to comprehend the miraculous usage to which these traditional theories are applied.

He will then understand that a musician utilizes *raga*, a little like the poet utilizes words, fixed in a grammatic form, but developing in his mouth, an infinite network of correspondences. And the *raga* is of a much greater suppleness; with a single one of the themes that govern the ancestral laws, the musician, by a nuanced repetition, by an interlacing of the *raga* with himself, arrives at the realization of the true object of his art: the expression of moments of silence, to which the traditional themes give only precise colourations, permitting each auditor to relish more concretely the savour of suffering. And each of these themes is of a universal simplicity: the night, the morning, the spring, the evening ... I understand that a Western man, a truly and purely Western man cannot tolerate the feeling that he is nude and alone, on an afternoon that is eternal, or in a first evening watch that will never terminate, that pitilessly returns, ten times a minute, elongating each movement of the string, for him in an eternity of boredom. But if, by an act of love, he identifies himself with the Hindu auditor, with the music, with the musician himself, if he has the courage to affront his own solitude, he will then hear, but with something more than his ear of flesh, a new, unsuspected music.

Each measure returns to an instant of silence. In each silence, he finds himself, alone, once again, confronting himself: and it is always the same moment. The duration, resolved in identical instants, distends in a unique act of consciousness. The individual comprehends himself as he is, in the concrete presence of an instant. Another melody is born: no longer from the succession of notes, but from the relations between these moments of silence. From this, the feeling, often noted by Occidentals, of a music that develops itself according to a new dimension of time, that imposes its rule, no longer on the corporeal existence, but on a more intimate order, a more subtle form of existence. It is also impossible to transcribe, with our system of notation, that which constitutes the essence of the Hindu *raga*.

And the musical tradition of India knows that a given *raga* must allow the auditor to grasp the naked reality of his immediate existence. The *raga* is thus a truth; it attains its full significance only when played in the hour for which it was conceived. Keyserling, an Occidental amateur, having gone to Tagore's residence in order to sample some Indian music, recounts, "When yesterday, I expressed a desire to hear a theme from the middle of summer on a winter evening the musicians were initially reluctant, this seemed impossible to them."⁵ And the suggestive power of this music is such that, under its impulse, like under the impulse of every source of living thought from India, the count-traveller-philosopher wrote several rather well stated truths on the subtle art of *raga*. The Hindu music, through its relation to concrete being, could accomplish that evening, once more the true goal of the music, which is to provoke man to become conscious of himself.

The function of the instrumental concert, for a Hindu, and occidental

orchestra reveals to a similar contrareity. For the Occidental, harmony is subjectively defined by its agreeable character. Agreeable, because it pleases the body, pacifies the organism, permits the passionate impulses to repose in the sleep of their repression. Harmony is agreeable, that is to say, void of meaning. It assures a calm or moderate and pleasing agitation of the auditor's instincts, by giving, in a certain way, a body, a passionate substance to the melody. The same auditor, if he listens to the dissonances of an Oriental orchestra, or, even more, to an orchestra of "primitives" from whatever country, is usually disturbed. He criticizes the concord as dissonant, displeasing. He does not realize that the source of the disturbance, is not the acoustical phenomenon, indifferent in itself to all value judgement, to all affective appreciation; if he is troubled, it is by something within himself, something in the depth of his organism. A profound movement of the animal instinct, repressed by the training of his social life was perhaps awoken; he would not like to acknowledge it, he has spent his entire existence in refusing to acknowledge it.

Here, the Hindu music remains strictly faithful to the supreme device "*Know Thyself*." With a limited number of meticulously measured chords — appearing all the more strange and barbarous to the Occidental ear — it penetrates and completely transforms a man. Moreover, harmony, in the restricted meaning of agreeable accord given to it by the Occidentals, plays an almost non-existent role in the Hindu orchestra, because its real role, as I have said, its power to awaken, is equally annulled. The living harmony of the music of India, is rather, the result of a simultaneity of rhythms, complex and precise in their interlacings, that mimics, marvellously, the myriad multiplicity of a life; it triumphs when this wise diversity resolves itself in a final dissonance, unique cry of the sorrowed consciousness, or in the positive silence that encloses an entire universe. The music of the Occident has lost its sensibility for primitive rhythms; it has forgotten the degree to which they inspire thought. It subordinates the rhythm, simplified, denuded of its richness and efficacy, to its principle aim which is to "distract", to "kill time".

The theme of the *raga*, in manipulating the thread of the duration of silent moments, imposes on the individual the void form of his immediate consciousness. The accord and dissonance give content to this form: the organic being of man, with all its contrary and disordinant tendencies, is finally awoken and put in the only light in which it can be free — the lucid consciousness of the instant.

All primitive peoples knew how to utilize the irresistible power of certain rhythmic alliances, certain dissonances. Sometimes by a simple process, like frenetic acceleration, they accentuate still more, this power to violate and dominate the human kinesthesia. Thus, music became one of their principle instruments of sorcery, magic or social communion. The music of

Ibos of Nigeria, an example among thousands “touches the most intimate chords of the human being; it evokes his primitive instincts ... It exerts on the individual, a world so complete, that, as long as it lasts, his spirit is somewhat separated from his body. Even the European, however limited his disposition for the music, is compelled to feel the elemental forces of his nature strangely moved by the passionate fervor of the possessed musicians.⁶”

The magical music of the primitive inhabitants of India probably nourished the more civilized art of the Aryans. I could verify the almost hypnotic effect that the Dravidians of Ceylon, however accustomed they were to the public of the great European halls where they were performing, obtained from several rudimentary percussive instruments. It is probable that the Aryans, when they penetrated the Sapta-Sindhu, discovered analogous musical practices in the Dravidians who were already established there.

The Hindus, a resulting from an extraordinary mixture of races, knew better than any other people, how to master the magical power of music, to disengage it from religious ritual and to channel it, by refining it, toward goals more precise and more detached than those of conjutory or propitiatory magic. Their rapid progress, and soon, their mastery in the fabrication of instruments, permitted them to fulfil this task. Several of their instruments, derived from the most archaic lute, like the *sarod* are equipped with an extraordinary number of supplementary strings serving the resonance; but, due to the richness of the series of possible resonances, and to the suppleness of the instrument, in the hands of the interpreter of the *Raga*, this body of wood and strings, designating a schematic living being, vibrates and responds to each emitted note while the human being responds the same, in silence. A force of psychological penetration, develops the more astonishing because it is not related to the intensity of the sound. To the contrary, the Hindu musician knows how to play marvellously, almost in silence; he plucks a string living echos awaken in the instrument as simultaneously they awaken in the body of the audience. Then, with precise palpitations, the spider-like agility of his fingers modulates the lustre ; he lets the sound die, sculpting it until death, until silence. And, one could believe, he continues to sculpt the silence. At this moment, the music becomes almost *visible* around the musician; his fingers seem wielded by silent and luminous veins. The man who knows how to listen, in this supreme moment, finds himself awakened by the musical miracle, in an instant of perfect silence. The melody, which imposes the form and the harmony, which evokes the living substance, are reunited in their common goal: the silent moment of the perception of the self.

The perfection of such an art is linked to an exceptional, to a little noted historic circumstance, which one might call the *Hindu Miracle*, origin of an entire civilization, as one speaks of the “Greek Miracle” as the origin of our own. India, contrary to Europe, while acceding to reflective thought, to the point of having, from its antiquity, a syllogistic logic and scholastic, did not

efface the primitive foundation on which every civilization is built. Despite the Brahmins and their care to protect, through the caste, the integrity of the white race, from the first centuries of the Aryan immigration into India, a feature interpenetration operated between the new inhabitants, the Dravidians and the more ancient aborigines. The fact that two opposing mental developments co-existed at this time is evident in the Hindu writings; in the outlines of a perfectly logical and coherent doctrine, one notes, in a certain *Upanishad*, the manifestation of the inextinguished life of primitive magic. Likewise, the emotional power of the primitive music is conserved in Hindu music, but it is subject to the most elevated function which can be given to an institution or to a human art: that of awakening the consciousness, or provoking men to perceive themselves as they are.

It would have been artificial to discuss separately the Hindu dance and music. When Shankar dances, he is like the principle musician of an orchestra — a musician whose music would certainly have silenced itself. The *Ragas* are replaced by *mudras*, gestures fixed by tradition, each having a signification as precise as word and whose evocative power can even touch an Occidental who is ignorant, as I am, of their exact meaning. The musicians accompany the dancer — their eyes concentrated on him. They adroitly envelop him with their rhythms, as if to contain his silent gestures. They sustain his dance, create in each moment an atmosphere in which the gesture can assume its full value. The dancer and the musician are joined by a rigorous mathematic law; in fact, they do exactly *the same thing*, one searches for the invisible thread which unites them. The dance arrives at the apex of its power, perceived by moments of immobility, gulfs of consciousness suddenly hollowed by an arrested gesture and by the sudden, simultaneous silence of the orchestra.

The *ragas* and the *mudras*, subject to rigid, secular laws and simultaneously left to the free interpretation of the dancers and musicians, permitted the extraordinary scope of the Hindu mimicry. The actor and dancer are, in general, indistinguishable. The mime, with his dance, recounts the most complicated legends, which are all, moreover, familiar to the Hindu spectator. In the old danced drama, spoken language was omitted. The actors performed silent, extremely animated dialogues while the orchestra enveloped the mimicry in a sonorous atmosphere, permitting it to achieve its full significance. At times, the orchestra, is transformed into a choir and the human voices rise to glorify the heroes. In spite of the Orthodox Brahmins, the people, from all religious sections, reunite on the stage, to its greatest gratification, heroes, genies and demons from all the cults of India. The innumerable legends of Siva, Rama and Krishna, the embellishments that animate the great epic poems, all those traditional subjects of folklore, sustained by the direct and irresistible power of the music, are thus capable of touching, down to the last peasant, the people. At the same time, to the literal meaning of the legend, to the affective meaning of the accompanying music, is added a spiritual drama, not symbolised but directly resuscitated in

the consciousness by that which I call, grossly I confess, the succession of moments of silence and immobility. The possibility, for a man, to experience this last signification is not in anyway related to the intellectual culture with which he was afforded at birth; it depends solely on the level of his consciousness. It is to fear that Shankar, his musicians and dancers will be compelled to make heart-breaking concessions to the "good taste" sovereign to the French Bourgeoisie. It is true: when, with seven of eight dozen Hindus in the audience, and a dozen Occidentals, somewhat ashamed to be so, I concentrated on Siva-Shankar brandishing, with an evocative gesture, the imagined corpse of the demon-elephant Gajasur, it was extremely painful to hear twenty stomachs shaking on their seats, twenty imbeciles who saw one thing only, somewhat odd in fact. The actor, who until then had taken the role of the demon, became unnecessary. When his death was sufficiently visible in the precise arm gesture of Siva, he peacefully arose and returned, with his elephant head, to the wing. Since then, in a second performance, the actor-elephant uselessly rested his four paws on the carpet until the end of the performance; I am convinced that this was less disagreeable than the laughter of those amateurs of Orientalism, but it was false.⁷

It is probable, therefore, that in respect for this sacred "taste" of the public, the future spectacles which will be presented here by Shankar, the dancer and Bhattacharya, the musician, will not be what the first two were; as I cannot imagine what would have been a better resume, in a single evening of the multiple possibilities of expression in the Hindu music and dance mimicry: from the popular dances, peasant dances of seeding and harvest, wedding dances or sword dances; the mimed legends of Indra, the Master of the dance and the Gandharvas, his celestial musicians, the pastoral dances of Krishna and Radha, to the very beautiful sampling of the old Hindu drama, the *Tandava Nritya*, the Dance of Siva, to the most pure, most skillful and penetrating interpretations of the *ragas*, with which Timir Baran Bhattacharya and his musicians allowed a few Occidentals to suspect, for the first time perhaps, an infatuating reality that they did not want to feel: *time* and the essence, silence.

II

During the last several years something extraordinary has occurred in the various European cities. In Paris, twice in the Spring of 1931 and a third time in May 1932. In Monte Carlo, in August, 1932. It was this: Hindu thought, alive, authentic, in flesh and bone, in sound, gesture and spirit was presented, here, in our very midst. Nothing deformed it, which is a kind of miracle: neither stupid translators, nor hypocritical interpreters, not even the smallest shadow of lesser Theosophy.

Man must live lest thought degenerate into Proteus. In those moments, then, thought was expressed not in words, but in human bodies, those of Uday Shankar and his colleagues, musicians and dancers.¹

I hope they will perform in France again one day, and if, because of these lines, two or three human beings seize the rare opportunity to see and to hear that miracle, my debt toward those unexpected poets (for once the word is not misplaced) will be a little less immense.

If our words were not so tattered, I would have already said all that I wish to say. But will one believe what I write: *poets*, I would really like to say conscious creators of charms, men who possess supernatural means of expression and utilize them to speak of the spirit. Will one believe that these miracles can actually make us cry with shame, can make us blush before the "spectacles" to which we go out of habit, in order to "distract" ourselves?

It is so, however; it is not a superficial enthusiasm that could have deceived me for a year and a half. To those beings, bearers of the always new immemorial beauty, I can offer no more than a barbarian's salute. In their presence, I felt grotesque, stupid and false. As I watched them, the word "civilization" pronounced itself within me, perhaps for the first time, without evoking anything odious.

The great miracle of the arts and sciences of the Orient was there, millennial and perpetually reborn: the rigorous determinism of a tradition, opening to awakened individuals, the door to a real liberation.

Crippled in the chaos of the Occident, without a connecting thread, I can only wish to play the necrologist-poet to an inimical culture. The East is still alive. If, by a miracle, it is not dragged into the suicide of the West, it will still live and there will be men on the Earth who can think. But the Occidental free-arbitrary-dualist individualist, the sad capitalist-colonialist-imperialist corsetted in the etiquette of the same order — he is finished.

"Spectacles", "distractions", "diversions", shame! Watch passively, forget, evade yourself, turn from the Great Question — that is the immoderate collective pleasure of millions of my contemporaries, each day, morning and evening.

Neither the dance nor the music of India exist *to distract*. On the contrary, they exist to refocus, incessantly, man's gaze on the intolerable centre of his solitude, on the Problem, on the absurd but dazzling power — the only power; and on the possibility to refuse the sleep of the Earth. Even when the music or dance of the Hindus is gay, tender, sweet, friendly, it is mercilessly so, it is truthfully so, it is always merciless and true; and if we, Barbarians, understand then a little, we will bow our heads before these pure existences.

Certainly these men bring us only a small sample of that which still survives from the conscious art of Asia. And yet how miserable even this

little (if I dare say it) renders the desperate attempts of renewal in the music, dance and modern theatre of the West.

I believe myself capable of summarizing, in a few words, a rather common European opinion on Oriental Music, as stated in an article by M. Boris de Schloezer.

Oriental Music would be essentially "magic", sympathetic magic, and a little bit satanic; it would issue no appeal to the intelligence. The Oriental auditor would passively submit to it, asking only to be bewitched; he would experience a rapture differing only slightly from the intoxication of hashish (sic.). Occidental music, in contrast, would be "anti-magic", thus praiseworthy and good, and would demand above all, to be "understood".

But what does it mean to "understand" the music? For the first time I find a simple response to this question, a response directly inspired by M. de Schloezer's article. True, it would hardly be accepted, even by Occidental musicians. But it invaluablely indicates a profound tendency in many Occidental listeners. Occidental music, then, can be "understood" because "it has succeeded in subordinating" all its sonorous elements to the melody; and the melody would be precisely the intellectual, if not intelligible, element in the music.

I believe I can translate in more simple language: "to understand" the music, for the average western listener is to be able, when leaving a concert, to whistle the melodies one has heard.

Now, I would like to hear someone affirm, honestly, that *by the fact alone* of retaining a melody one has really *understood* something, *gained* the intelligence within oneself of a truth. I do not believe that anyone will answer this challenge.

How clear that becomes to one who listens to Hindu musicians who hears them again and often, and sees them dance their music — for dance and music separate no more than eye and ear. How clear it becomes to one who hears and sees them, without prejudging that which he will not understand! Despite my ignorance of musical theories, I think I have "understood" at least this.

Through a universal symbolism, the music of India speaks to the total man, in his three aspects, the stomach, the thorax and the head (as the Cosmos appeared in the form of Earth, Atmosphere and Sky).

To the stomach, which embodies the whole life of the organic reflexes, the whole biological mechanism: the timbres, the intensities, the gestures.

To the Thorax, which feels and feels again, with all the modalities of suffering and pleasure, desire and aversion: the *Ragas*, series of notes, fixed by an incalculable tradition, determining the character of the melody according to the hour and the cosmic circumstances in which the Musician plays. Each *raga* is associated with an hour of the day and a nuance of mood; I say truly "nuance", as *raga*, properly, signifies "coloration".³ Its role then, unlike the Occidental melody, is not to make us experience this or that emotion with the pleasure of a dilettante, differing little from the "morose delight" of the theologians, its role is, above all, to harmonize human feeling with the conditions of nature in a given moment. (Moreover, the rigid attitudes of Western spectators greatly disturb Hindu musicians, who consider it unnatural to play a *raga* for the morning at 10 o'clock in the evening; and this rule, which astonishes us at first, is, if one reflects upon it, very apt. *Raga* is thus a very beautiful instrument with which to regulate human passions and it is that, doubtlessly, which one calls "sympathetic magic", "hashish", etc.).

To the Head, which is the intelligence, there is the rhythm (*tala*). And the rhythm, manifested by the musician, is the intelligible essence of things. But as soon as the head grasps a truth, it must make this truth accessible to the other aspects of man's totality: then there is comprehension. Thus the rhythm, primordial element of Oriental music, is a structured resonance which addresses itself simultaneously to the most hidden resources of flesh and desire, and to the most lucid facets of the Spirit.

Occidental music hardly acknowledges this third element. Granted, it is not exclusively melodic, no matter what M. de Schloezer thinks, and it seems to have become less and less so during the last few dozen years. But, in general, when it abandons melody, it is prone to fall into chaos or into a muscular and nervous massage, more or less skillful and violent; Stravinsky's music is a good example.

Because of the preeminence of rhythm, drums, always numerous and varied, are accorded first place among oriental instruments. In the Hindu opinion, they are also the most ancient and require an extraordinary knowledge and technique: half a human life is necessary to become a proficient player.

I will try to recall, in weak verbal reflection, several moments of comprehension imparted to me by these men.

Timir Baran Bhattacharya, with his *sarod*, suddenly became a sonorous sun, radiating waves of resonant silence.

And even imbeciles are crushed. Only the silence of certain cathedrals speaks, at times, with such lucidity.

I would like to say in Latin: *musicus silet*. "Silere" — active verb. For the Occidental today, the word is obscured by the thing. The *thing*, can I say, the *cause*: the cause of sounds is silence, as the One or, moreover, the Non-multiple, is the cause of the multiple.

And, amid the diversity of sounds, this music always signifies the indescribable and positive silence. Silence and solitude before a single thing, which is. Which is — not audible but which listens through the sounds that endure. All men suffer from an evident solitude. This is why brains were crushed and shoulders heavy, as sounds slowed down from a quarter of a second to a century, from a quarter of a tone to silence.

What drama is enacted between Vishnu Dass Shirali and T.B. Bhattacharya? The former is seated in the circle of his 10 drums, tuned according to a Hindu division of the octave; the latter, animates the sarod on his knees. The *raga* "Suffering Caused by Another", and intended for the hour "after midnight". A double fugal movement, but there is more than counterpoint, for two rhythms also conjoin, create a living harmony, separate, rejoin, silence themselves in a mute separation and once more commune. Drama, for as each player follows the theme of the *raga*, he strains his ingenuity to complicate the other's play, and they also dance, with the head and eyes. Living music — in the process of birth.

In the middle of a sonorous stairway of vertigo, V.D. Shirali finds the time between two precipitated notes to nonchalantly arrange a dream which doubtlessly had displaced itself by a hair's breadth.

On another plane, when I will leave the hall after a few moments of charms, two and a half hours will have elapsed.

Moreover, chronometres do not explode in the spectator's pockets. The chronometres don't have time.

Uday Shankar, perfect and all-powerful master, governs some four hundred and fifty muscles of his body; each one does exactly what he wishes it to do, obeying the Head only and ignoring the neighbouring tissues.

"Indra teaches the Dance to the inferior divinities". From his multiple ornaments, from the calm thunder of his feet against the soil to the precise rhythms contradicting and reconciling themselves, his body alone recreates the musk. One day he silenced the musicians and danced, while an entire ensemble rang and reverberated from his limbs.

When the last bell of a bracelet is absolutely silent, accentuating the definitive gesture of an arrested finger — the silence, the sudden motionless stillness is that of the sky above the storms.

Shankar by visible gestures, T.B. Bhattacharya by musical gestures, both seek to represent the celestial Gandharvas, singers and dancers. But don't they actually embody those divinities, these poets from the court of Indra, these two men who are no more than two living Expressions of a single word?

Krishna (Shankar) dances with the Guardian-of-the-Cows (Simkie) before revealing himself as Vishnu. They dance like children of a nobler age, but sometimes their arms stop for a moment in the air, tracing sacred signs of flesh and I tremble with the prescience of things to come: the army of the Pandavas on the Field-of-the-Sons-of-Kuru, the hesitation of Arjuna and his coachman, and suddenly, like a thunderbolt, Krishna ...

When Kanak Lata dances besides the Ganga (her arms trace the water through the gestures of ritual ablution) she recreates one of those Apsara freizes that adorn the temples of India. (But I assure you, one pinches oneself to be sure one does not dream. One can scarcely believe the beauty).

A certain rhythm belongs especially to demonic beings. I recognized it. It is very very similar to that which children sing and dance when they wish to taunt, (they know it, moreover, by instinct and oral tradition; for adults, in the West, know rhythms no better than they know children).

Moreover, several instruments are specifically reserved for the demons. Their sounds, which we would call *false* in relation to our musical scales, are true however in relation to their object. Certain intervals and certain tones appear only in connection with the demons; and in fact, no one is fooled, everyone recognizes the demon, even if his intelligence seeks to deny it.

One of these demonic instruments has the same coloured circles and the form, but larger of our *diabolo*, as if by chance.

The Dance of the Dancer-of-the-Worlds

From the beginning of the drama the centuries are obliterated.

The choir, with the voice of instruments as old as the *Vedas*, celebrates the divine couple, Siva and Parvati, who suddenly appear, statuesque, in the middle of the stage, without one having seen them enter, without any machinery at all. In the same way they disappear, so simply that not one of our directors could imagine the process. Then the musicians announce the approach of Gajasura. His hurried steps precede him, until suddenly he is there, dancing demonically on the entire earth, represented by a few square metres of planks. After these preliminaries, the drama — which I will thoroughly recount — begins.

The choir and the actors conjoin sonorous rhythms and rhythmic gestures to form a single action. Each, according to his voice, recites the narration.

Siva (Shankar) and the Gajasura (Debendra) oppose each other. Siva fights with his divine weapons: with the five elements, the winds and dust, the forces of Earth, the Atmosphere and the Sky, and also with the serpent of his arms, whose undulations prevade the air like a moral wind.

Sita (Simkie), his manifest Power, the Reservoir of his Energy, stands inexhaustibly beside the combatants. Her divine husband has met the most redoubtable Forces. Body to body, tremendous clashes follow — still on a few square planks.

The demon is overwhelmed. (But what mysterious act of love do I believe to discern in the struggle to death?) The choir sings the Merciful.

The Great Prince dances his victory. He dances himself and he dances the World — the total movement. By *mudras*, ancient gestures which are words, and for which I do not have the keys, by flashes moreover, I distinguish that which he says with his body: the seed that he contemplates, that which with love and regret, in his palm, the seed which he suddenly envelops with his voracious heart. Terrible, that which he abandons in order to return to the sleep that engendered the world. And She, in her extensive power, is She not this world itself — She, the extensive movement which comes from Him, she, the liquor of immortality from which he drinks. Terrible and sweet in turn, and more and more quickly, the two faces of the god of the spirit alternate, until suddenly, he is One only — to destroy my heart.

Then the sleep, eternal, lucid, without duration; as She dances her distress to endure, to inhabit a body.

NOTES

1. This article was published in the NRF on the occasion of the performances in Paris of Uday Shankar, with his troupe of dancers and musicians.
2. Once and for all, I make it clear that the Oriental of which I speak is the conscious Oriental; he is it the more when he affirms himself as an enemy of Occidental imperialism and colonialism. And the Occidental, to whom I oppose him, is particularly, the Bourgeois Occidental, doubly a victim of his traditions and dogmas, because he must not only submit to them, but must strengthen them in order to maintain his power.
3. Tao Tsi King.
4. There were, musicians in the Occident, who pursued goals which were alien to the normal mentality of their civilization. In this study, they are held outside of the discussion. The last and the greatest among them was J.S. Bach.
5. H. De Keyserling, *Journal de voyage d'un philosophe*.
6. G.T. Basen, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria*, cited by L. Levy-Bruhl, *Le surnaturel et la naturel dans la mentalite primitive*.

7. After a tour in Germany, Italy, etc. Shankar gave, on the 13th of May, a new performance in Paris. Several changes in the programme—unfortunately in the sense that I have foreseen. But, when Shankar magnificently repeated the Dance of Indra before the silenced orchestra, resuscitating the entire ensemble with the rhythmic sounds of his ornaments alone, the public accepted this, at the very least, as a tour de force.

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